

Community Connections

Best Practices for Volunteers

Getting Started

1. We need your help! Middle schools are looking for adults who enjoy students and who want to help students increase academic performance. Plan on **one adult to one student** or one adult to a small group of students. You will be given a small task, e.g., read a book with a student, assist with a project, help with homework, etc. One to two hours a week can make a significant difference.
2. **Contact your local middle school. Ask for the school contact person.**
3. Let the school know preferences for days and times of availability, as well as what you would like to do. Expect an answer within a week. Otherwise, call again. Schools can be busy places.
4. The school will probably offer an **orientation**. If not, ask the contact person about rules for school visitors, special school practices, where to report the first time, etc. You may also wish to contact a fellow volunteer for more information.
5. Sign up for any **extra training** if your school or district provides this. Check with the school contact person for dates and details. You can consider yourself a caring academic coach. This means that you show interest, concern, and watch students perform while you serve as a guide on the side. Observing the learner, offering assistance, or planning where to go for further help will be more useful tools for a learner which can last a lifetime.
6. **Be patient.** There can be great satisfaction in spending one or two hours a week with a middle school student doing homework, reading, or math. But middle school students may not show anything back right away. That is their nature, and does not mean that you are not making a difference.
7. Please **do not do** the students' work for them. A volunteer's role is to be a coach, to encourage, and to help the student accomplish a goal. If you are unclear about how a teacher wants an assignment completed, one strategy is to help the student contact the teacher or ask a friend from the class.

8. **Teachers can be your best resources.** If you have questions, you may wish to **call or write a teacher**. They know what skills students need, and how a volunteer can help a student improve in school. Since they are also very busy, they can return a call/note or set up a special time to discuss your student with you.
9. Focus on **student academic progress**. Progress comes in small steps as students will gain skills and valuable self-esteem. Let the relationships develop over time.
10. **Schools will get parent permission** for student participants. Since parents have their own responses to volunteers, check with your school contact person before contacting a parent. Most parents will appreciate a call or note from you sometime.
11. Plan to complete appropriate school/district **volunteer registration forms or check with your school** to see what is required for you.
12. **What's in it for you?** You are contributing toward middle school academic achievement, a lower high school dropout rate, smarter well-trained workers, and more productive citizens. But, mostly, it's the great satisfaction of knowing you made a difference in someone's life. Thank you.

For more details about Community Connections or for school contacts on Best Practices, please contact **<http://jessicadoyle.wisconsin.gov>**